

BOOK REVIEW

S.K.B. Asante: *African Development: Adebayo Adedeji's Alternative Strategies*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 1991, 232 pp.

The study of the development experience in independent Africa since the late 1950s and the debate of finding appropriate development strategies for the continent, continues to command the attention of many academics. This book is conceived as a contribution to this debate. In it, the author presents a critical evaluation of the alternative development strategies to Africa's economic crisis proposed by Adebayo Adedeji — executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), from 1975 to 1991.

In working out the central theme of the book, the author first examines the broad issue of how best to promote development in Africa. This is followed by a cursory discourse on the early formative years of the ECA and the extent to which Adedeji as executive secretary was determined to revitalize the organization by making it a dynamic influence throughout Africa.

Related to his discussion of how best to promote development in Africa, the author highlights the extent to which the ECA under the leadership of Adedeji succeeded in re-evaluating Africa's development performance and direction. He observes that to avert the "impending doom" and to change the tide of Africa's economic fortune in her favour, the ECA leadership (headed by Adedeji), has searched for an indigenous development strategy for Africa, designed to provide a new approach to development and economic growth efforts in Africa based on the principle of self-reliance and self-sustainment. This strategy has found expression in the Lagos plan of Action — an elaboration of the "Monrovia Declaration" — as advocated by Adedeji and the ECA in collaboration with the OAU.

But while the search for an indigenous development strategy remains one of the most significant contributions of the ECA under Adedeji's leadership, the author however, contends that a major shortcoming of Adedeji's strategy was its avoidance of discussion of economic development as a process involving both economic and non-economic factors, particularly the political context of development. The author opines that for accelerated and long-term development, Africa needs a new approach to its political economy. This should include among other things, the distribution of political and economic power accompanied by effective popular participation in decision making process.

S.K.B. Asante's book also focuses significantly on the extent to which Adedeji

has attempted to implement the strategy of economic cooperation and integration as key elements of the Africa development process. The establishment of ECOWAS in the West African sub-region is advanced as a singular achievement of Adedeji in this regard.

Similarly, the author highlights the central role which Adedeji played during the period of "grave economic crisis in Africa", which he had predicted since coming to the ECA and the on-going challenges of Africa's recovery and development. These analyses are supported with a number of statistical tables showing the hard facts relating to Africa's economic crisis. (pp 139-142).

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this book is the author's masterly articulation and presentation of Adedeji's development strategy for Africa, as an alternative to orthodox World Bank/IMF sponsored structural adjustment policies (SAP). This strategy — the African Alternative Framework (AAF) — integrates adjustment with structural change and transformation. While "transformation" is the sole policy objective of the people and the government, "adjustment" constitutes the instrumentality for achieving this objective. With the adoption of AAF-SAP, the author opines that the challenge that faces the African economies in the 1990s and beyond is not achieving external financial balances (important though they are) nor achieving budgetary equilibria but to expand and diversify, and achieve an increasing measure of national and collective self-reliance.

What thus emerges from the arguments and conclusions advanced in this book is a succinct but exhaustive synthesis of the development strategies proffered by Adedeji as alternative paths to Africa's development. But while the author succeeds in articulating Adedeji's many speeches, addresses and statements into a coherent body of thoughts on Africa's development, some weaknesses in the handling of the subject must be pointed out.

The first discernible weakness of the book is the author's failure, perhaps deliberately, to draw the line between Adedeji's individual contributions to the development strategies presented in the book and those of the ECA team of social scientists which he headed. The result of this oversight is that very often, ideas and contributions proffered under the auspices of the ECA tend to be presented as the individual contributions of Adedeji. Since the book sets out to examine specifically, Adedeji's alternative strategies of African Development, it would have been useful to demarcate between his individual initiatives and those of the ECA team which he led.

The second discernible weakness of the book is that the language appears unduly patronizing for what is intended to be "an objective scholarly study of Adedeji's contributions to Africa's development". Although the author makes it clear from the beginning that the book is "not a bibliography of Adedeji nor is it a compilation of his numerous speeches and statements", yet in the following pages, the book almost degenerates into this. Particularly illustrative of this are the sub-headings of chapter two variously titled, "Adedeji's Professional Background", "Adedeji's Inheritance" and "Enter Adedeji: Redynamizing the ECA."

These weaknesses notwithstanding, the book remains a useful contribution to the existing body of literature on the debate of finding appropriate development strategies for the African continent. Its uniqueness lies essentially in the fact that the book represents what is perhaps the first attempt to study closely, the contribution of an African academic, economist and an international civil servant to the development question in Africa.

Ibhawoh A.B.
Department of History,
Edo State University,
Ekpoma.